

# ADOT needs reality check on proposed freeway

By Jim Jochim

A map of the proposed Loop 202 South Mountain Freeway shows the three West Valley connection options and the one East Valley connection option. It also displays the existing route on Interstate 10 to downtown Phoenix. One of the sales points that the Arizona Department of Transportation has been trying to "sell" is that it will reduce the traffic flow on I-10 to downtown Phoenix once it is open.

Based on that premise I decided to put their theory to the reality test: I started with this question: What is the mileage between the intersection of the San Tan Freeway/Pecos Road and Central Avenue and I-10? Based on my odometer it was 16 miles. That is an important number to remember because that is the reference point for comparison – because for all people who currently enter I-10 at Pecos/San Tan who want to go to Central Avenue via the I-10 it is 16 miles.

While I was doing this data gathering process I continued on to the "proposed" exits of 55th Avenue, 71st Avenue and the Loop 101 interchange. The mileage between Central and I-10 to each of these points is 5.8, 7.9 and 11.3 miles respectively.

I then called HDR [a Phoenix-based consulting firm on the project] and spoke with Amy Edwards and she provided me with the approximate length of the South Mountain Freeway from the San Tan/Pecos starting point to the three options on the west side. They are as follows: 55th Avenue Connection = 21.5 miles, 71st Avenue connection = 22 miles and to the 101 connection = 23 miles.

This means to reach Central Avenue and I-10 via the "proposed" South Mountain Freeway Loop 202 the mileage from the San Tan/Pecos and I-10 is as follows to the three proposed West Valley exits:

- 55th Avenue: South Mountain Loop 202 miles = 21.5, then back tracking east on I-10 to Central Avenue = 5.8 miles for a total mileage of 27.3.
- 71st Avenue: South Mountain Loop 202 miles = 22, then back tracking east on I-10 to Central Avenue = 7.9 miles for a total mileage of 29.9.
- 101 (99th Avenue): South Mountain Loop 202 miles = 23, then back tracking east on I-10 to Central Avenue = 11.3 miles for a total mileage of 34.3.

Now here is the reality question: If you were at the intersection of San Tan/Pecos Road and wanted to go to Central Avenue and I-10, which route would you take? I think most rational people would say the shorter route because if you choose 55th Avenue you are increasing your distance by 11.3 miles or 71 percent, at 71st Avenue your distance would increase 13.9 miles or 87 percent and at the Loop 101 your distance would increase by 18.3 miles or 114 percent.

So who might use this proposed South Mountain Freeway? Obviously not the people in the Ahwatukee Foothills or the East Valley area unless they work near the 55th Avenue, 71st Avenue or the 101 interchange. So let's just call it what it is a bypass route for those who are driving west on I-10 to Los Angeles or east on I-10 to Tucson and beyond.

ADOT needs to take a timeout. As this plan came out of the archives, it is outdated, and based on their estimates it will not be completed until 2015. That is nearly three decades since it was a line on the map. They need to start with a "blank sheet" of paper and start to think out side of the box for the future.

That means if we need a bypass route let's place it before metro Phoenix on the west and east side so it will serve the greatest good for those who want to bypass Phoenix and are traveling on I-10 – east or

west. I have heard at the ADOT / South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team (SMCAT) meetings that in the year 2025/30 that Avondale is going to be the "center of Phoenix," then let's plan for that dimension. Let's build it right and be forward thinking about the growth that is taking place in West Valley and in Pinal County.

Based upon my academic background (MBA from ASU) this is an "Econ 101" issue – our great state has a lot of transportation needs, and we have only limited resources – so someone – maybe our effective and competent Gov. Janet Napolitano needs to have the ADOT people "rank order" the various transportation issues in the state to help them decide what problems to be worked on and in what order. I know there are pressing issues in the Tucson and Flagstaff areas also.

I attended the SMCAT meeting on Dec. 1, 2005, at the Gila River Indian Community Komatke Center and listen to an energized dialogue between the team members and the presenters. One of the items that disturbed me was the lack of accurate data on various issues. For example, someone asked about the water table levels in the West Valley and ADOT didn't have the data. Another team member, Laurel Arndt, asked about the traffic count data on Pecos Road and it doesn't exist either – is this anyway to make long-term decisions? We need to be data driven!

Now here is the irony. In the *ADOT Advisory Fall / Winter 2005 Brochure*, they make this statement on page 2: "50 percent of the traffic on a South Mountain connection at I-10 at 55th Avenue would come from or go east (downtown Phoenix) on I-10." Now ADOT is making projections on a road that doesn't even exist and yet they do not have any traffic count data on Pecos – a road that does exist! Go figure that one.

Please call me at (480) 460-2535 if you have any questions and I will be happy to respond.

*Jim Jochim has lived in Ahwatukee Foothills for 10 years, and his home is more than two miles from Pecos Road. He is active in the No Build on Pecos organization, which promotes the no-build option for the South Mountain Freeway on Pecos Road.*